

## Safe Berks Gift Wrapping Table Breaks Record!



Thanks to all our volunteers for donating their precious time to wrap gifts and help Safe Berks! From left, employees of Santander Bank; Alexis Dawkins, of Safe Berks, and her family and friends; and PeaceTrust members and friends.

Thanks to the dedication of our incredible volunteers, and to generous members of the community who brought their gifts to be wrapped, the Safe Berks Gift Wrapping Table raised a record-breaking \$13,240!

“We are truly amazed by the support we received from the community,” said Mindy McIntosh, Director of Development at Safe Berks. “Our volunteers helped at the Gift Wrapping Table every day from Dec. 1 through Dec. 24. We want to thank the Berkshire

Mall for inviting Safe Berks to hold this important fundraiser, and to all the individuals, families, churches, community groups, and businesses who supported this effort. Special thanks to Pamela Conlon and Santander Bank employees who covered all the weekday shifts, and to Alexis Dawkins of Safe Berks, who coordinated this effort. We are so grateful for your support.”

These much-needed funds will help support Safe Berks and our mission of providing free services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. “In addition to raising funds for Safe Berks, our volunteers also shared valuable information about the free services we offer survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault,” said Mindy. “We hope to see everyone back at this fun event next December!”

## Donors & Volunteers Share Holiday Spirit with Safe Berks!



Thanks to all our generous donors who gave wonderful holiday gifts to the residents of Safe Berks! From left, Zion Baptist Church, Reading; FedEx Reading Station; and Glen-Gery, Wyoming.

While many of us enjoy being home for the holidays, for victims of domestic violence, home can be the most dangerous place of all. Safe Berks provides a safe haven and support. Thanks to many generous donors and volunteers, the residents of Safe Berks received lovely gifts and delicious homemade meals during the holidays. Thank you for sharing your time and resources and making sure the holidays were warm and bright at Safe Berks!

## A Message from our CEO

Happy 2022! As we begin a new year, I am proud to share with you highlights of our recently completed Strategic Plan. This Plan will guide Safe Berks for the next several years, as we continue to enhance the free, lifesaving services we provide to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Our new Strategic Plan is the result of collaborative efforts of our staff and our Board of Directors, led by Board President Amanda Jackowski, CPA. The Plan took shape after many meetings, surveys, and discussions during the second half of 2020 and throughout 2021.

Safe Berks is a mission-driven organization, and our new Strategic Plan begins with our new mission statement:

***Safe Berks provides a safe haven and support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault through education, advocacy and a relentless commitment to prevent abuse. We are dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment where individuals can be their true selves and feel empowered to stand up to all forms of oppression.***

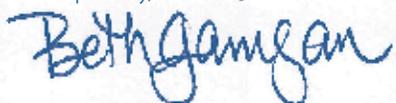
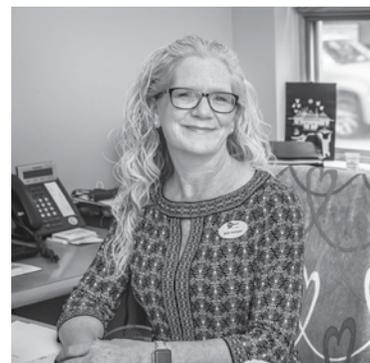
We are guided to achieve our mission through our shared vision: ***Berks County has zero tolerance for domestic violence and sexual assault.***

Our new Strategic Plan includes long-range strategies to fulfil our mission and achieve our vision, including enhancing recruiting and staff retention efforts, launching our equity and inclusion initiative, and expanding our educational programs, community outreach and response, and fundraising activities. We are honored to do this work!

We are also looking forward to Spring and warmer weather. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and our dedicated staff members are collaborating with local hospitals, colleges, and community organizations to bring light to a subject often kept in the dark. Please see page 5 for more information about Sexual Assault Awareness Month. We aim to help end the stigma around sexual assault, focus the attention on the prevalence of sexual assault, and educate our community about how to prevent it.

In closing, please know we are so grateful to all our donors, volunteers, advocates, and community friends, for ensuring the holidays were warm and bright for our survivors, as shown on the cover of this Newsletter. Thanks to each of you, we are building a Safe Berks!

Respectfully,

Safe Berks CEO Beth Garrigan  
Photo by John Secoges, Photo courtesy of Berks County Living magazine

## Safe Berks Seeking Volunteer Cooks!

Safe Berks is seeking volunteers to provide dinner to residents every evening of the week. Another option is to sponsor dinner from a local restaurant.

For more info, or to schedule a dinner, please contact Mindy McIntosh, Director of Development, at 610-468-9637 or [MindyM@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MindyM@SafeBerks.org).

Thanks to all our volunteer cooks! Together, we are building a Safe Berks!



Special thanks to staff and students of Immaculate Conception Academy, Douglassville, for preparing a delicious meal for Safe Berks residents!

**Safe Berks services are free, confidential, and available in English and Spanish.**

Toll Free Hotline:  
**844-789-SAFE (7233)**

or

**Text SAFE BERKS to 20121**

Available 24/7/365

**Counseling**

610-373-1206, ext. 606

**Legal Services**

610-373-1206, ext. 107

**[Peace@SafeBerks.org](mailto:Peace@SafeBerks.org)**

**[www.SafeBerks.org](http://www.SafeBerks.org)**

**Follow Safe Berks**



## Safe Berks Services to College Students

Safe Berks provides our services to local college students, faculty, and staff on the five local college campuses in Berks County. These free and confidential services include campus advocacy, short-term empowerment counseling, safety planning, legal and Title IX advocacy, and law enforcement and court accompaniments. Additionally, the Higher Education Campus Specialist partners with college staff, student clubs, Greek life, and other student leaders to provide awareness and prevention programming on campus.

“College students are at an increased risk of experiencing sexual assault and/or intimate partner violence,” said Victoria Simmons, Higher Education Campus Specialist at Safe Berks. “Additionally, students may not be aware of resources available to them and are less likely to seek services when they are not completely confidential. Students having access

to a Safe Berks advocate on campus creates a more trauma-informed and victim-centered approach to providing support services to survivors. These services allow survivors the opportunity to regain control over their lives and decide what is the best choice for them to move forward as they begin their healing journey.”

“In addition to providing information and support for survivors of interpersonal violence, dating violence, and sexual assault, my position allows me the opportunity to promote education, awareness and prevention through training courses, class presentations, advocacy events, and community engagement across the campuses I serve,” said Victoria.

**For more information, contact Victoria at [VictoriaS@SafeBerks.org](mailto:VictoriaS@SafeBerks.org).**



## Safe Berks Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)



Marissa Pham, Sexual Assault Response Team Coordinator

Marissa (Bond) Pham began serving Safe Berks as the new Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Coordinator in September 2021.

“The Sexual Assault Response Team works to provide a coordinated community response to victims of sexual violence, and to minimize trauma to the victims,” said Marissa. “The SART Team includes members of the Berks County District Attorney’s office, law enforcement, healthcare professionals, prison staff, and Safe Berks representatives, among other community partners.”

Working closely with Safe Berks Medical Advocates, Marissa provides direct service to victims of sexual assault in local hospitals. Marissa is also the Safe Berks liaison to the Children’s Alliance Center, helping support pediatric

victims of sexual assault and their non-offending family members. She serves victims of all ages, and their families, providing assistance in working with police, and helping connect them to services offered by Safe Berks and other community resources.

“Through my direct service to survivors of sexual violence, I am able to understand more of the victim’s perspective and provide direct feedback to our critical partners who provide response services to survivors,” said Marissa.

In 2022, Marissa will also provide outreach and education services throughout Berks County, including partnering with law enforcement, hospitals and healthcare facilities, and other community service agencies, in an effort to improve understanding and response to survivors of sexual violence.

Prior to joining the Safe Berks team, Marissa worked in the field of Gender Rights and Victim Advocacy for more than 10 years, including four years working abroad in the Caribbean region and in the East African nation of Uganda. She said, “As a native of the Pennsylvania Deutsch community of rural Berks County, I am proud to be home again, and eager to uplift survivors’ voices.”

To reach Marissa, email [MarissaP@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MarissaP@SafeBerks.org).



## Me Too Meetings

Hosted by Safe Berks, for students and young adults, age 18 or older, who are survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, or relationship abuse. These free meetings will encourage empowerment and offer support and resources.

**Date: Mondays**

**Time: 5-6 p.m.**

**Location: Friend, Inc.,  
658 Noble St., Kutztown**

**For more info: Contact Victoria Simmons, Safe Berks Higher Education Campus Specialist, at [VictoriaS@SafeBerks.org](mailto:VictoriaS@SafeBerks.org) or 484-651-9745.**

# Peace Trust



## to Host First Cupcakes for a Cause!

On March 28, 2022, the PeaceTrust Women's Giving Circle, with the support of Safe Berks staff, will hold a special new event! The first PeaceTrust Cupcakes for a Cause will be held at Wyomissing Restaurant & Bakery from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.

This festive event will bring together current PeaceTrust members, potential new members, students, staff, and our Board. All will enjoy the fun of decorating delicious cupcakes! The finished cupcakes will be shared with Safe Berks residents, as well as with the artists who create them.

Safe Berks Board member, Hamid Chaudhry, owner of the Wyomissing Restaurant & Bakery, has

generously donated not only his restaurant space, but all the materials needed to make and decorate the cupcakes. Additionally, the event will include a personal story shared by a survivor, information about Safe Berks free and confidential services, the benefits of becoming a PeaceTrust member, and how someone can support Safe Berks.

PeaceTrust, a Women's Leadership Giving program that benefits Safe Berks, was founded in 2006 by Carolyn Holleran and is now led by Andi Funk. Members of PeaceTrust donate funds to support our free 24-hour services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Each member commits

to donating \$500 to Safe Berks each year for five years. There are also opportunities for new Junior members to join by donating \$300 per year, and for young women to become "Link" members with a \$100 donation.

"We greatly appreciate the support of our PeaceTrust members," said Beth Garrigan, Safe Berks CEO. "In addition to generous financial support, PeaceTrust members donate their time and share ideas with Safe Berks. We are all looking forward to this creative new event!"

Stay tuned for details about additional events this Spring!

**If you or someone you know would like to support Safe Berks as a PeaceTrust member, please visit**

**[www.SafeBerks.org/donate/peace-trust/](http://www.SafeBerks.org/donate/peace-trust/) or contact Mindy McIntosh, Director of Development, at 610-468-9637 or [MindyM@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MindyM@SafeBerks.org)**

## Bilingual Economic & Housing Specialist



Michelle Nunez, Bilingual Economic and Housing Specialist

In the summer of 2021, Michelle Nunez began serving as the Bilingual Economic and Housing Specialist at Safe Berks. Prior to that, she had served survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault for four years as a Bilingual Residential Case Manager in our Safe House.

In her new position, Michelle provides crucial services to survivors, assisting them to achieve their goals of finding good jobs and obtaining independent housing. She helps survivors recover from financial abuse, a common form of control used by abusers. Financial abuse can include preventing the victim from working, preventing access to financial resources, and destroying the victim's credit.

Michelle coordinates Job Fairs for Safe Berks clients, teaches a Financial Empowerment curriculum, and collaborates with many employers and property owners and managers to assist clients obtain jobs and housing. She also works with clients individually to help them reach their economic and housing goals.

"The best part of my job is being part of my client's success, big or small," said Michelle. "From helping them secure employment to securing their own home, it's extremely satisfying knowing I played a part in their success."

To contact Michelle, call 610-373-1206, ext. 208, or email [MichelleN@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MichelleN@SafeBerks.org).

## Safe Berks Victim Advocate Training

All Safe Berks staff, and all volunteers who provide direct service to clients, are required to complete Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Training. This training is offered by the Education and Outreach Department at Safe Berks, led by Delio Santana, Manager of Education and Outreach Programs.

The next training session will begin on April 20 and will be a hybrid version offering classes both in-person and virtually.

**To register to attend Safe Berks Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Training, contact Delio Santana at [DelioS@SafeBerks.org](mailto:DelioS@SafeBerks.org) or 610-370-7811.**

## April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month #SAAM

During April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), Safe Berks staff will share thousands of teal ribbons along with information about our free services for survivors. These teal ribbons will be distributed at hospitals, medical offices, restaurants, shops, and at many other locations throughout Berks County.

“Sexual Assault Awareness Month provides the opportunity to have difficult conversations and educate individuals on sexual assault and common misconceptions,” said Meghan Sager, Manager of the Medical Advocacy Partnership Program (MAPP). “It also helps survivors feel more supported and reinforces the fact that abuse is never a victim’s fault.”

Safe Berks staff will also plant pinwheels, to symbolize support for victims of sexual assault, and will share information at events and via social media pages.

“SAAM is important because sexual assault is sometimes viewed as a taboo subject that not many people want to talk about; however, it needs to be discussed in order to raise awareness about the issue and educate people about how to prevent it,” said Delio Santana, Manager of Education and Outreach Programs. “SAAM is our time to focus attention on the prevalence of sexual assault, honor the voices and experiences of the survivors, and equip our community with tips and resources they can use to support these survivors.”

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), more than 460,000 Americans are sexually assaulted each year, on average, one every 68 seconds.

Safe Berks Medical Advocates are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to meet with survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence who visit any local hospital or health care facility and offer to connect them with free services. Medical Advocates also offer free education to local health care professionals. Meghan said, “We want healthcare workers to be knowledgeable about our agency’s support services and to recognize the benefits of making referrals when abuse is identified.”



*Delio Santana, Manager of Education & Outreach Programs*



*Safe Berks staff will plant pinwheels to symbolize support for survivors of sexual assault.*



*From left, Brittany Alonzo, Medical Advocacy Partnership Program (MAPP) Specialist, Meghan Sager, Manager of the MAPP Program & Gabbi Valoy, MAPP Specialist.*



## Safe Berks Lunch & Learns

Safe Berks offers free lunch and education about sexual assault and domestic violence to Berks County healthcare professionals.

Identifying and responding to sexual assault and domestic violence in health care settings can make a huge positive influence on the health of survivors!

**To schedule: contact Meghan Sager, Manager of the Medical Advocacy Partnership Program (MAPP), at [MeghanS@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MeghanS@SafeBerks.org) or 610-373-1206, ext. 108.**

# SAVE THESE DATES!

## Fundraising Dinner

Friday March 11  
5-8 p.m. at Wyomissing  
Restaurant & Bakery

Tickets \$20, available online at:  
[www.safeberks.org/fundraising-dinner/](http://www.safeberks.org/fundraising-dinner/)  
Eat In or Take Out!

## Celebration of Peace & Walk for NO MORE

Saturday June 18

*Voices for Change* Honorees  
Penn State Health St. Joseph  
Olivet Boys & Girls Club  
of Reading & Berks County

Questions, contact Mindy McIntosh,  
Director of Development, at 610-468-9637  
or [MindyM@SafeBerks.org](mailto:MindyM@SafeBerks.org).

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
READING, PA  
PERMIT NO. 155

The vision of Safe Berks is:  
Berks County is free from  
domestic violence and  
sexual assault.

- ▶ Crisis Services
- ▶ Residential Services
- ▶ Education & Outreach
- ▶ Counseling
- ▶ Systems Advocacy
- ▶ Legal Services
- ▶ Medical Advocacy
- ▶ Community Engagement

### Board of Directors

Amanda Jackowski, CPA, President  
Mandy Acuna, Vice President  
Nicole Yuengel, Treasurer  
Barbara Boland, Secretary  
Helen Najarian, Director Emeritus  
Beth Garrigan, CEO  
Mereliss Colon Ortiz, COO  
Jasmine Suarez, CFO  
Heather Adams  
Carey Babczak  
Sherry Berriker

Dr. Noahleen Betts  
Auria Bradley  
Hamid Bashir Chaudhry  
Denise DiMascio  
Karolina Dreher  
Helen Flynn  
Sara George  
Alneasa Jordan  
Jennifer Jones Lapp  
Paul Marrella  
Adrean Turner



Educate • Advocate • End Abuse

### Gifts to Safe Berks

The Give Now button, located on our website at [www.safeberks.org/donate/donate-now/](http://www.safeberks.org/donate/donate-now/), is a convenient way to support Safe Berks. Receipts are generated immediately via email. The official registration and financial information of Safe Berks may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does imply endorsement.

### Contact Us

Safe Berks  
255 Chestnut Street  
Reading, PA 19602

[www.SafeBerks.org](http://www.SafeBerks.org)  
P: 610.373.1206 | F: 610.372.4188  
Email: [Peace@SafeBerks.org](mailto:Peace@SafeBerks.org)

Toll Free Hotline:  
844-789-SAFE (7233)  
Or Text SAFE BERKS to 20121



United Way of Berks County

